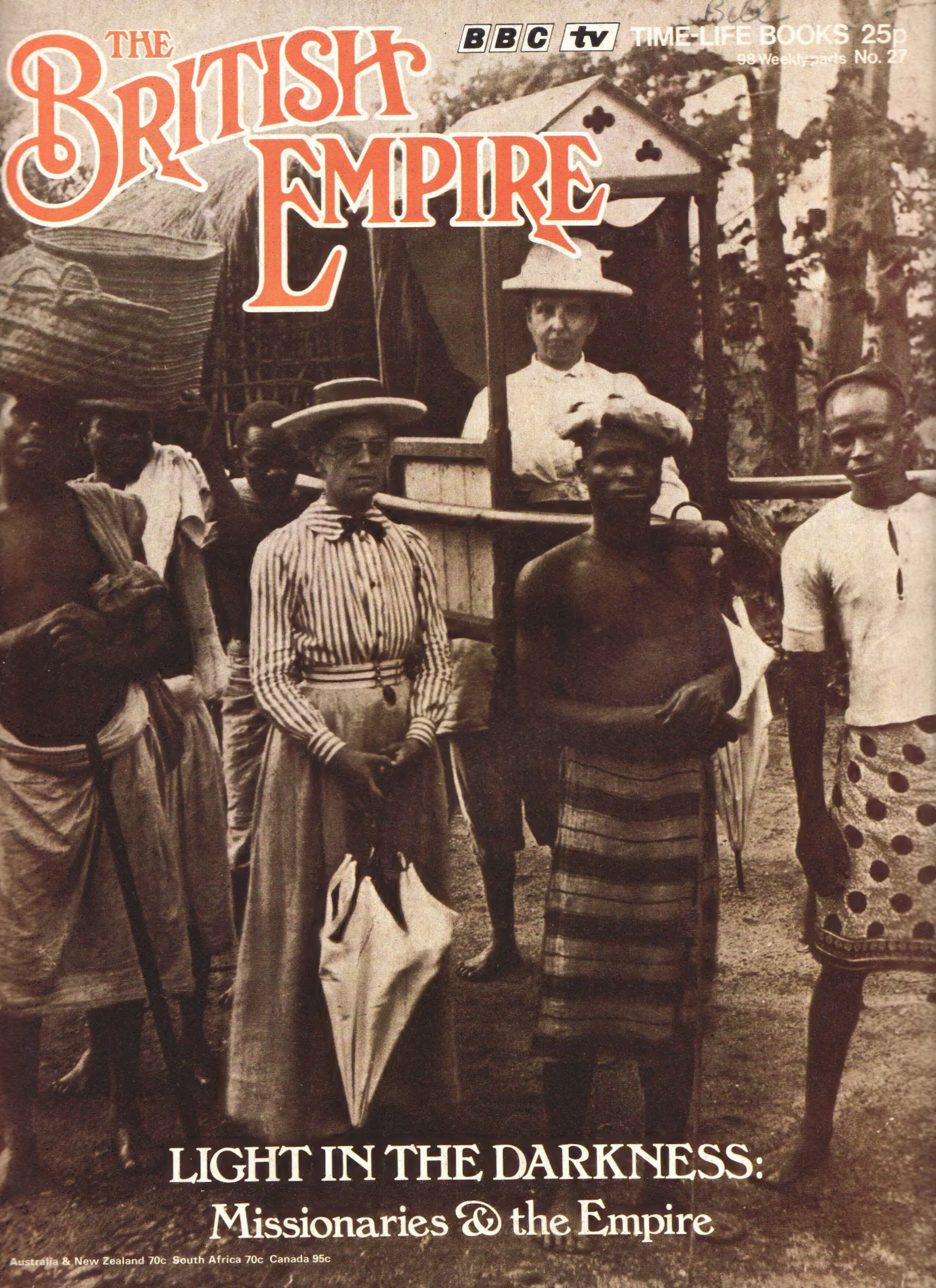
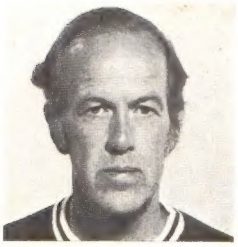

THE BRITISH EMPIRE
BBC tv
TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 27
LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS:
Missionaries & the Empire
Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 27

Editor Harold C. Field
Deputy Editor John Man
Picture Editor Jean I. Tennant
Design Consultant Louis Klein
Staff Writers Stephen Webbe, Simon Rigge, Hilary Macaskill
Picture Researchers Marian Berman, Pamela Marke
Art Director Robert Hook
Assistant Art Director Graham Davis
Art Assistant Bridget Allan
Editorial Assistant Anne Morgan
Staff Photographer Eileen Tweedy
Partwork Director Kurt Medina
Sales Director George Gillespie
Consultants D. K. Fieldhouse, Lecturer in Commonwealth History and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford
A. F. Madden, Reader in Commonwealth Government and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford



DAVID MITCHELL, author of the text sections of this issue, read history at Oxford University and has since written extensively on historical subjects, including Commonwealth affairs. Since editing a theological quarterly, *The English Churchman*, he has had a continuing interest in the tactics and mentality of missionaries. His books include *The Fighting Pankhursts*, *Joan of Arc* and *1919 Red Mirage*.

Subscriptions – These are available at £6·50 for six months, inclusive of postage and packing. For addresses outside of the United Kingdom, the rate is £8·75, inclusive of surface postage and packing.
Back Numbers – These are available at your local newsagent or may be secured by post for the inclusive price of 25p per issue. Be sure and specify which issue(s) you desire.
Orders for both subscriptions and back numbers should be sent, with remittance, to *The British Empire*, BBC Publications, 35 Marylebone High St., London W1M 4AA.
Binders – These may be ordered at £1·05 for the Standard edition and £1·75 for the Deluxe edition, either individually or on subscription. Orders, with remittance, should be sent to *British Empire Binders*, BBC Publications, P.O. Box No. 126, London SE1 5JZ.
NOTE: All above payments should be by crossed cheque/P.O.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: (*t*=top; *b*=bottom; *l*=left; *r*=right). Cover and page 754: United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Inside back cover: by courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum. Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights 752; Trustees of the British Museum 745, 755; Church Missionary Society 731, 744; Church of Scotland Overseas Council 735*b*; John Johnson Collection, New Bodleian Library, Oxford 729, 730*l*; Koninklijk Museum Voor Midden-Afrika, Tervuren 753*l*; London Missionary Society 748*b*, 749; National Maritime Museum, London 736/737*t*; National Portrait Gallery, London 730*r*; High Commissioner for New Zealand 732; Overseas Missionary Fellowship 746/747; Radio Times Hulton Picture Library 733; United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 739–743, 748*t*, 750/751, 756; University of Pennsylvania 753*r*; by courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum 734, 735*t*, 736/737*b*. PHOTOGRAPHERS: Roybon Raikes cover, 748*t*, 750/751, 754, 756; Eileen Tweedy 729, 730*l*, 734, 735*t*, 736–743, 745–747, 748*b*, 749, 755, inside back cover.

© 1972. Time-Life International (Nederland) N.V.
Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

Published by Time-Life/BBC.
Printed in England by Jarrold and Sons Ltd. Norwich.

All letters please to:
The British Empire,
76, Oxford Street, London W.1.

BY THE WAY

Missionary activity in the 19th Century is a field still largely untouched by professional historians. No authoritative, brief – and above all readable – account of the achievements of these remarkable men and women exists. One glance along the relevant shelves of a good library shows the major reason why: the amount of source material is utterly formidable.

The Society of the Propagation of the Gospel took 700,000 words simply to outline its history over the previous 200 years. The book lists 114 languages in which its missionaries laboured, almost all of whom left a written record of his work.

Why this plethora of words? Because of the nature of missionary work itself. It demanded men and women prepared to devote their whole lives to God. Convinced of the overriding importance of their work, they felt driven to record every last detail of their achievements.

The power of this conviction is well illustrated by the preface to *The Martyr of Erromanga*, the biography of John Williams, who really was eaten by cannibals. (His fate is described in this issue.) Williams' biographer, John Campbell, begins with a staggering expression of faith: "missionary activity, he declares, can substitute knowledge for ignorance, and love for enmity."

"The result of this substitution will be true and perfect civilization – the resurrection of buried intellect – the subjugation of unhallowed passion – the infusion of real humanity – the extinction of war, with its calamities – the establishment of peace, with its blessings – the annihilation of all that is hurtful to man, and the introduction of all that is contributory to his happiness – liberty – literature – arts – science – commerce – just legislation – and international harmony."

The preface ends in portentous capitals: "IN THE WHOLE COMPASS OF HUMAN BENEVOLENCE, THERE IS NOTHING SO GRAND . . . AS THE WORK OF EVANGELIZING THE HEATHEN." Backed by such monumental self-confidence, it is no wonder that missionaries reaped such a harvest of souls.

CONTENTS

729. Light in the Darkness
The self-confident and, in retrospect, arrogant attempt of the missionaries to bring British religion and civilization to non-Christian peoples.

739. Picture Essay: "From Greenland's Icy Mountains..."
Missionaries' publicity for their work in many parts of the world, answering – so they believed – the heathen's call "From Greenland's icy mountains/From India's coral strand. . . ."

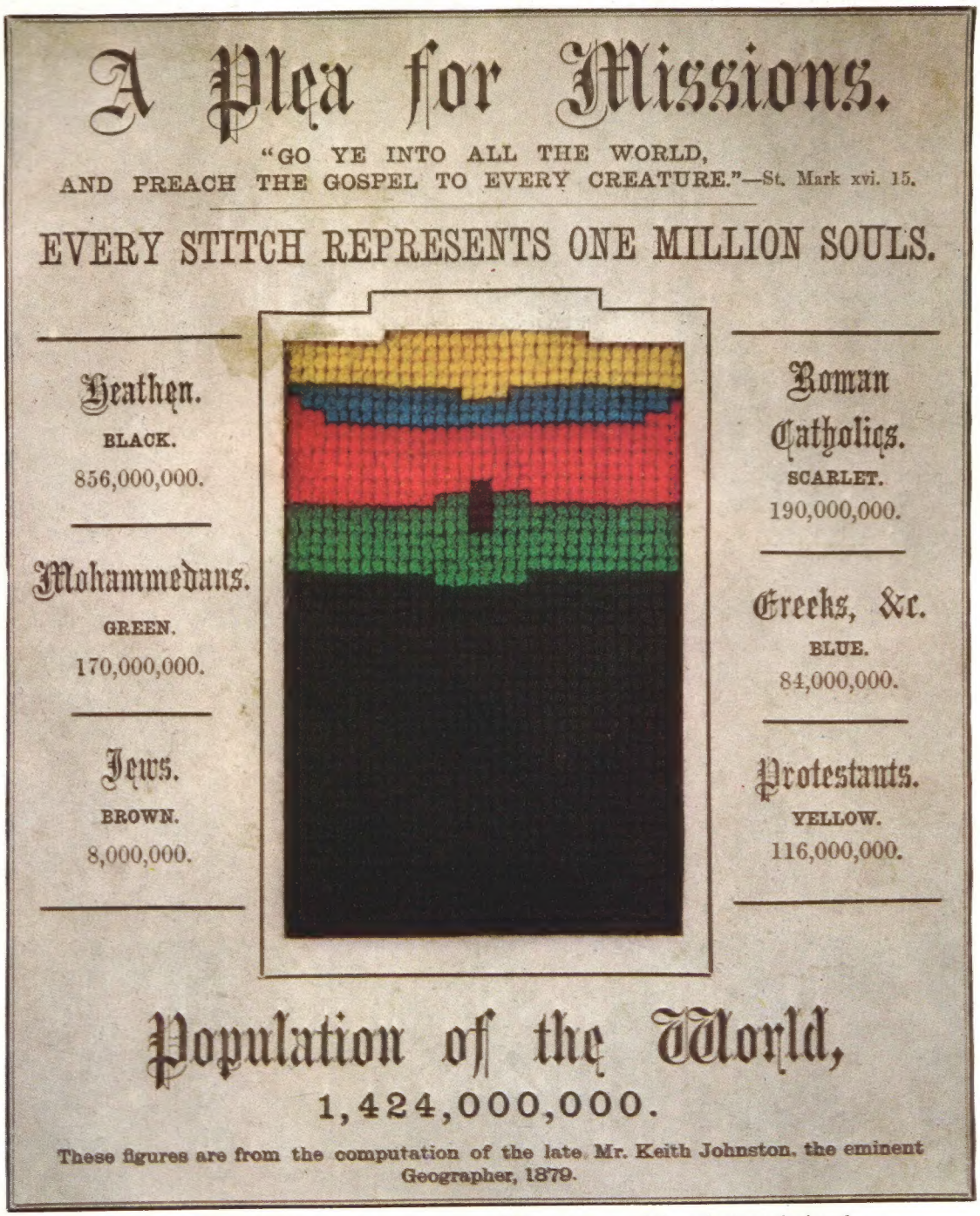
744. In Need of Protection
The ambivalent attitudes of missionaries in far-away places who asked for government protection, but then, when the gunboat or district officer arrived, had second thoughts.

748. Picture Essay: Little Pockets of Civilization
The secondary work of the missionaries in spreading literacy, medicine and simple technologies.

752. A Tea-Drinking Existence
The end of the missionaries' pioneering days when British luxuries such as afternoon tea came to the African bush.

Cover: Two Victorian missionaries pose for a photograph before going into the African bush with a team of native porters

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



This fund-raising advertisement stressed the vastness of the missionaries' task.

Inspired by the 18th Century Evangelical revival, Protestant missionaries set out to bring Christian light to the Empire's "dark" regions. The work of these dedicated people brought official opposition and public controversy. Were they right to attempt the destruction of other religions? To bring ideas of equality to subject races? To extend Empire by demanding official protection? By 1900, these complex issues remained unsolved.

By David Mitchell

Some of the greatest Victorian heroes and heroines were missionaries: pursuing their evangelical work, brave men and women were decimated by malaria and yellow fever in Africa; clubbed, boiled and eaten in the Pacific islands; tarred and feathered in the Caribbean; massacred in India during the Mutiny of 1857 and in China during the Boxer Rising of 1900. None of these disasters deterred them and dedicated volunteers were always available to fill the ranks of the fallen. By 1900, societies in Great Britain and Ireland could support 10,500 missionaries round the globe; by contrast the United States supported 5,500 and continental Europe only 2,500.

In its most successful eras – the 19th and early 20th Centuries – the missionary movement provided much of the Christian civilization in the overseas colonies for which politicians in England smugly took credit: an estimated 90 per cent of the educational and health services in the Afro-Asian Empire were staffed by missionaries and financed by their supporters in England. Not until the end of the Second World War did government belatedly attempt to make good its long neglect of these areas.

The missionary movement was hardly a flicker in the darkness before the end of the 18th Century. Throughout the period of Empire which ended with American independence in 1783, very little was done to take Christianity to the unconverted world overseas. Anglican chaplains and missionaries were dispatched to India, America and the West Indies, it is true, mostly by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). But these clergymen were primarily concerned with the moral and spiritual health of settlers, officials and plantation-owners who were already Christians, and not with making converts among the natives.

A few missionaries in the West Indies and America managed (if they were tactful or courageous) to baptize and instruct a number of Negro slaves, but they did not dare criticize the institution of slavery. For fear of enraging the slave-owners, they were forced to acquiesce in a system they regarded as un-Christian. Ironically, the SPG went so far as to acquire estates and its own slaves to whom its representatives could preach in safety.

The title-page of this pioneering missionary report reveals evangelicals' hopes that, in shipping the Bible to foreign shores, they were answering the heathen who called "Come over and help us" (Transiens adiuva nos).

One person in particular was responsible for the dramatic end-of-the-the-century change – John Wesley, an Anglican cleric who spent two frustrating years from 1736 to 1738 in the newly founded American colony of Georgia. During that time, he had not converted a single soul to Christianity: in fact, he ended this stay in the New World with doubts about his own belief. Upon his return to England, however, he found the certainty he was searching for. Like St. Paul in Biblical Palestine, he saw the Truth in a sudden flash of inspiration. Armed with a new, unshakeable faith, he began the astonishing career which brought a dramatic religious revival in Britain and a new, forceful approach to the unconverted in foreign parts.

The faith that Wesley had found was Evangelical Puritanism, whose key concepts were original sin, the devil, heaven, hell, the rigid observance of Sunday and the literal truth of the Bible. If the Bible was the Word of God, he argued, every Briton was doomed unless he repented. The force of this clear, urgent message had an electrifying effect. Under Wesley's command, the doctrine hit Britain like a revolution. Preaching in halls and prisons, in open spaces and among the toiling, uneducated masses, Wesley was soon drawing hysterical crowds of up to 80,000.

The British Establishment was shocked and disgusted. Not surprisingly, for this emotional Puritanism – they sneeringly labelled it "enthusiasm" – challenged the prevailing ethos, the tolerant scepticism and pleasant hedonism of the Age of Enlightenment. It looked like a revolution and the ruling classes treated it as such.

The demagogic fury released by the French Revolution helped to change their minds. It seemed as if frighteningly egalitarian slogans from France would soon contaminate the deprived English working classes. Suddenly, Wesleyan doctrines began to appear a positive godsend to British political and social stability. For Wesleyanism – often known as Methodism after its adherents' resolu-

This man was a revolutionary. Benign John Wesley caused a religious upheaval in Britain that snowballed into a missionary movement to Christianize the whole world.

tion to conduct their lives by "rule and method" – was a gospel that sanctified the values of the new bourgeoisie: thrift, hard work, temperance, discreet ambition, respect for authority. Buoyed up by the prestige that a few conversions among the upper classes had brought it, the new religion spread like wildfire, building up a faithful home constituency which provided lasting support for the missionary movement overseas.

One of Wesley's Evangelical supporters, Lady Huntingdon, once told him: "Attempt nothing less than all mankind." He could hardly have imagined to what extent her message would come true. Wesley himself did a prodigious amount in Britain: before he died in 1791, he had travelled 225,000 miles and preached 50,000 sermons. But the Evangelical Revolution that he had started could not be stopped short at the British Isles. Countless new converts took heed of his doctrine and prepared to obey literally Christ's command set down in the Bible: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Almost providentially, new and fertile fields for missionary endeavour presented themselves. The voyages of Captain Cook, the victories during the Napoleonic Wars that brought unexpected acquisitions of territory for a new Empire, and the expanding scope of the anti-slave-trade campaign – headed in Parliament by a leading Evangelical, William Wilberforce – offered many new areas for activity by a variety of Protestant Churches that were now part of the Evangelical movement. In swift succession, the major organizations for preaching to the heathen overseas were founded: in 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS); in 1795 the Congregationalist-sponsored London Missionary Society (LMS); in 1799, the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS); finally, in 1804, the interdenominational British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).

Now the foot-soldiers of the Evangelical revolution, the missionaries in the field, sallied forth to do battle wherever the enemy was to be found – it made no difference to these warriors whether they battled against sophisticated higher religions such as Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism in Africa and Asia, or pure primitive worship in Australasia, the South Seas and Canada. Like all impatient revolutionaries, they were convinced that they had to be cruel to be kind; that they had to clear away a lot of rubbish in order to bring the light of Christianity; and that if the result of their work was initially to create a spiritual desert, well and good. The uprooting was essential if true religion was to be securely planted.

It took a special kind of person to carry forward the ambitious work of the missionary movement in the early 19th Century. Fortunately, the times had produced many such individuals.

Until the 1860s, few missionaries were ordained. Very few of them had received secondary, let alone higher education.

For example, the LMS task force that landed at Matavai Bay, Tahiti, in 1797 included only four ordained clergymen. The rest were butchers, carpenters, weavers, tailors, harness-makers, bricklayers and shopkeepers. Together with some wives and children they formed a miniature and, it was hoped, model Christian community that would set an example to the idle, sensual, bloodthirsty islanders of the Pacific.

Robert Moffat, the great LMS missionary who went in 1816 to the Bechuana people in South Africa, among whom he laboured for nearly 50 years, had little education and no formal theological training. Mary Slessor, whose work in Africa won her the name of "the white Queen of Okoyong," had been working in a linen-mill in Dundee from the age of 11. When she sailed as a missionary for Old Calabar in Africa in 1876, she had received a mere three months of instruction from a Presbyterian clergyman. Even this she regarded as superfluous since she was already "mighty in the Scriptures" on her own account. "God and one," she later wrote confidently in her Bible, "are always a majority."

In passing, it is interesting to note that an outstanding success was achieved by the missionaries who came from Scotland, where the educational system at all levels was then much superior to the English.

These keen, fearless evangelists got small wages: £20 a year plus seeds, some livestock and agricultural implements in

A missionary in Africa, stricken with malaria, rides in a litter in search of a healthier area.

Marsden among the Maoris

Samuel Marsden, the first missionary in New Zealand, won such an exalted place in missionary history that he has been compared to St. Augustine. It was an unwarranted reputation: St. Augustine at least converted a Saxon king within six months, but Marsden's Anglican mission took 11 years to baptize its first Maori – a flawed triumph, for the man who accepted the Christian way of life was on his death-bed.

Marsden, a blacksmith's son, came to the South Pacific after William Wilberforce, later the prophet of anti-slavery, induced him to cut short his studies at Cambridge and carry the Gospel to Australia. There Marsden served as chaplain to the convict settlement of New South Wales and made his first contact with Maoris who came to Australia as members of the crew of whaling vessels.

In December, 1814, the tubby missionary landed at New Zealand's Bay of Islands and, as the mid-19th-Century woodcut (below) shows, extended his hand in friendship to a group of unimpressed Maoris. Three days later – Christmas Day – Marsden tackled the task of sowing the Word of the Lord on the stony ground of New Zealand. One of Marsden's Maori friends, Chief Ruatara, enclosed half an acre of land with a fence, erected a makeshift pulpit and lectern in the centre and arranged some old canoes as seats. Over this improvised chapel was hoisted the Union Jack. "It seemed to be the signal for better days in this benighted land," wrote Marsden, who took as his text the gloriously hopeful message of St. Luke's Gospel: "I bring you glad tidings of great joy."

The tidings made no lasting impression. He returned to Australia, leaving behind a mission so unsuccessful that the ensuing decade has been labelled "the Maori domination." One missionary, who admitted he had been converted "from a Christian to a heathen," had to be dismissed, for drunkenness and other "vile passions" too indelicate for mention in his superiors' report. Marsden's influential friend Ruatara died. The Maoris terrorized the missionaries, pilfering their meagre possessions and openly despising the Gospel which, they said, was not suitable for warriors. "Satan," wrote a New Zealand bishop years later, "had obtained a strong hold upon the people."

Marsden made seven visits from Australia to strengthen the mission. But by the time he died in 1838, Satan, "the enemy," had yielded hardly an inch. Only later were Marsden's efforts rewarded, for in the 1850s the Governor reported that nearly all the Maoris were Christian. This reversal owed more to the spread of British rule than to missionary persuasiveness, but it was nevertheless – at least in missionary eyes – a dramatic success for the Christian message of which Samuel Marsden had been the pioneering torch-bearer.

New Zealand; £60 a year for Mary Slessor as a "female agent." But they had unlimited personal scope, being, as one of them put it, "little Protestant Popes . . . forced by self-imposed isolation to be prophet, priest and king rolled into one." Unofficial, and sometimes, like David Livingstone and Mary Slessor, official British consuls, they made peace between warring tribes, legislated for their "subjects," and came home to enthrall big audiences with accounts of witch-doctors, cannibal feasts, human sacrifices, harems and the inexorable but hard-fought advance of Christian decency.

There were from the start many who were determined to limit missionary work in the field – in India, in the West Indies, in Australasia. Often, only the vast strength of support at home prevented total failure.

In India the missionaries faced stiff anti-Evangelical opposition from the all-powerful East India Company. The Company might tolerate priggish chaplains, but was dead set against missionary work among the Indians on the ground that it would cause civil disturbance. So, when William Carey, a cobbler who was a Baptist village pastor, arrived in Bengal in 1793, he was treated as an illegal immigrant. The Company forced him and his companions, Joshua Marshman, a school-teacher, and William Ward, a printer, to seek refuge in the Danish colony of Serampore, near Calcutta.

The "Serampore Trio", as these men became known, toiled for 30 years translating the Bible or portions of it into Bengali, Sanskrit, Marathi and ten other languages. They also ran a college "for the instruction of Asiatic, Christian and other youth in Eastern Literature and European Science." Carey's study of classical Hindu texts triggered a Hindu renaissance and he became recognized as the founder of prose literature in Bengali.

For his scholarly efforts poor Carey reaped a harvest of criticism from both friend and foe. In London, even his sponsors – the BMS – frowned on his Bible translations since they thought it unwise to open Protestant principles to the scrutiny of converts whose adherence to Christianity might be questionable.

To their enemies, the evangelists were the thin end of the wedge. Charles Marsh, a former Madras barrister speaking for those who wanted India to remain "unspoiled," prophesied during a debate in the Commons the likely outcome of missionary activity: "I leave it to those who are versed in moral calculations to decide . . . whether predestination and gin would be a compensation for the changes which will overcome Indian habits, morals and religion."

Canon Sydney Smith, speaking for well-bred Anglicans who found Puritanism distasteful, ridiculed the Serampore Trio as "a nest of consecrated cobblers." He doubted if a missionary "could look a gentleman in the face," and insisted that "if we wish to teach the natives a better religion we must take care to do it in a manner which will not inspire them with a passion for political change." In his opinion this was not likely to be achieved by ignorant zealots who would "deliberately, piously, and conscientiously expose our whole Eastern Empire to destruction for the sake of converting half-a-dozen Brahmin."

For the Evangelicals final success came in 1833 when, after a debate on the renewal of the Company's Charter, India was opened to any missionaries who wished to go there; no longer was Company permission required. Soon after this, Alexander Duff, of the Church of Scotland, having gained the support of the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, at the time a member of the East India Company's Council in Calcutta, inaugurated a programme of higher education in English with the aim of creating a cultured Christian élite. And Evangelical laymen serving in influential posts in India supplemented and defended the efforts of the missionaries.

But Sydney Smith's arguments about political disruption never lost their force with the rulers of India, even after control passed from Company to Crown. In 1857 the missionaries were reckoned by the Administration to have been largely responsible for the Indian Mutiny. Right up to the time of independence in 1947, despite most missionaries' hostility to the nationalist movement, the Administration remained suspicious of them.

In the West Indies, the planters and the Colonial Church Union were outraged by the appearance of LMS envoys early in the 19th Century. With reason, the missionaries were regarded as agents of the hated abolitionists. Indeed, the missionary movement was closely allied with the anti-slavery crusaders in all parts of the world where slavery existed.

The missionaries had been carefully briefed before leaving England: "not a word must escape you in public or private which might render the slaves displeased with their masters or dissatisfied with their situation. . . . You are not sent to relieve them from their servile condition but to offer them the consolations of religion." But though most of the missionaries carefully observed their briefing, their mere presence was provocative; to slave-owners the pretence that the Negroes would resign themselves to a purely spiritual equality – in itself an offensive notion to white colonials – was considered naïve to the point of hypocrisy.

When John Smith, an ex-baker's apprentice, arrived in British Guiana in 1817, he was bluntly told by Governor Murray, "If you ever teach a negro to read and write and I hear of it, I will banish you from the colony immediately." Held responsible for a bloodily suppressed slave revolt in 1823, Smith was arrested, sentenced to death by court martial, and died in a cell in Colony House, Demerara, while awaiting confirmation of his sentence from London. Smith's martyrdom was the subject of a heated Parliamentary debate and provided excellent emancipationist propaganda; as did the testimony of the Knibb brothers, arrested on a similar charge in Jamaica in 1831 but brought home by a ship of the Royal Navy to give evidence before committees of the Lords and Commons. Only after the abolition of slavery in 1833 did the attitude to missionaries in the West Indies improve.

In Australia the first missionaries were free from government interference since the Governor, Arthur Phillip, was a thoroughgoing sceptic who was willing to make use of Christianity if it could create a peaceful community. But they found other serious obstacles in their way. Richard Johnson, a graduate of Cambridge University and therefore a notable exception to the general run of humble, artisan missionaries, began one of the toughest assignments in missionary his-

The mass baptism of slaves (above) in planter-dominated Jamaica caused an uproar, and in 1791 the slave-owning authorities arrested the missionaries responsible, William and James Knibb.

tory when he accompanied the first consignment of convicts to Botany Bay. This was the destination of criminals who could no longer be transported to the American colonies, now independent states. Johnson's rough fellow passengers greeted him with ribald and violent hostility. But he had the help of the Rev. Samuel Marsden, a robust and persistent Puritan. Together Johnson and Marsden weathered the storm.

In 1814 Marsden went on to found the first mission in New Zealand, leaving there a joiner, a shoemaker and six mechanics from New South Wales to convert the native Maoris to Christianity. Here, as in Australia, there was no interference by colonial governors – but only because there was as yet no colonial government. However the missionaries were soon at loggerheads with colonial groups in London that advocated the annexation of New Zealand and therefore threatened missionary freedom of action and the Maori way of life in the islands.

By the time this controversy was at its height in 1840, the missionary movement had become much more powerful than in the early days. Some idea of the formidable influence it could bring to bear can be gleaned from the evidence given by Edward Gibbon Wakefield to Parliament in 1840 in support of his plans for the settlement of New Zealand, the plans the missionaries were blocking. Wakefield, furious, demanded to know what chance his project had when the principal officials concerned with overseas settlement were officers of the Anglican CMS. The Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, Sir James Stephen, also happened to be a son-in-law of John Venn, one of the founders of the CMS.

Influential connections of this sort did, in time, come to be of enormous assistance to the missionaries. For they faced strong opposition at home as well as abroad. Anti-imperialist Little Englanders, agnostics who opposed conversion of the natives to any religion, humanists who argued that indigenous religious practices should be respected, comparative anthropologists aghast at the suppression of long-established ways of life – all had criticisms to make of missionary work.

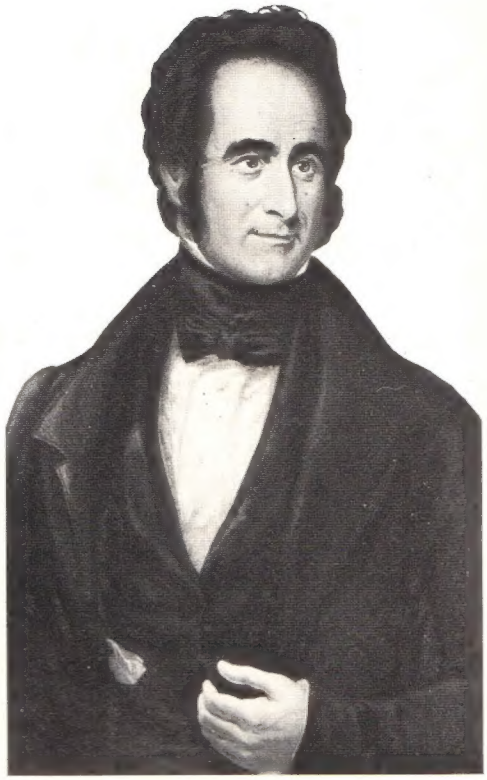
True believers in the lower echelons of the movement simply brushed aside as irrelevant the objections of these annoying people, but the men who held positions of power in the missionary movement were less hasty. They were political realists and knew that only through clever manipulation of contemporary techniques of persuasion could they ensure their freedom to work the overseas vineyards. To this end they made full use of their champions in Parliament, and they also realized the value of propaganda.

To woo the rising middle classes, backbone of Victorian society, missionary propaganda stressed the missionary role in multiplying commercial outlets (all those savages to be clothed and raised towards Western living standards) and inculcating the heathen with the gospel of hard work. To overcome government opposition, missionaries pointed out that their efforts produced political docility in the newly acquired territories.

Missionaries on furlough lost no chance of painting the "dark" side of native life in order to attract funds. Missionary meetings, with their tales of physical and moral squalor in Asia and Africa, were relished as edifying entertainments. Missionary magazines, depicting noble lives and self-sacrificing deaths, thrilled a huge pious-patriotic readership.

By 1837, an articulate spokesman for missionary activity, John Williams of the LMS, had devised the indivisible trinity of Christianity, Commerce and Civilization as justification for "meddling" in India and the Pacific. In *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, Williams bluntly stated that missionaries "in presenting the one great object to which their lives are consecrated . . . will keep in view whatever may promote the Commerce and Science as well as the Religious Glory of their beloved Country." To this end, Williams introduced the banana to the Pacific islands where hitherto it had been unknown, and CMS missionaries pioneered the planting of wheat in New Zealand.

Not to be outdone, the 1839 prospectus for Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilization of Africa outlined an



Robert Moffat, evangelist and garden-lover, lived among the Bechuana of southern Africa for 48 years and translated the Bible into Tswana, their unwritten language.

Mary Slessor's firmly set mouth and upright bearing hint at the iron will that carried this steadfast young woman through the ordeal of a girl missionary's life in West Africa.

ambitious programme in collaboration with the CMS that included the introduction of medical science, sanitation research, paper manufacture, establishment of printing-presses, and a commercial and agricultural advisory service.

In all these efforts to convince the British people of the value of their work, the missionaries were remarkably successful. They were human beings peculiarly representative of their time, faithfully reflecting the mixture of pious self-righteousness and hard-headed pragmatism which characterized the Victorian era, and they had no difficulty in amassing a vast group of supporters. In its 19th-Century heyday the missionary lobby in Britain headed a pressure group so large and so powerful that it became a kind of evangelical state within the state – often the bane of statesmen, diplomats, colonial administrators and businessmen.

It was over Africa that the missionaries and their supporters became most baneful. For Africa was the most important theatre of missionary operations and, having within their grasp an entire dark continent to be illuminated with the light of Christian civilization, the evangelists made every effort to prevent so exciting a project from being sabotaged – by government or anybody. But their task – to transform whole savage nations and peoples into model Victorian Puritans – was so vast that their own resources were inadequate for it. Consequently, they had to compromise themselves in various ways which proved most uncomfortable. For their own ends they became the allies of colonial authorities – even on occasion the instigators of imperial expansion – and so tarred themselves, in the view of later generations, with the brush of imperialism.

In 1865 a storm of controversy blew up which showed how badly the missionaries needed government help. In that year a Select Committee of the Commons examined the possibility of pulling out of West Africa altogether. Thereupon, missionary agitation reached a climax. Already afflicted with insecurity, the missionaries now had the nightmare of being left alone in a vast continent still untamed by European colonialism. In a frenzied response, they argued that abolition of the external slave-trade and emancipation of slaves, both achieved by 1833, was not enough: Britain must now

The Martyr of Melanesia

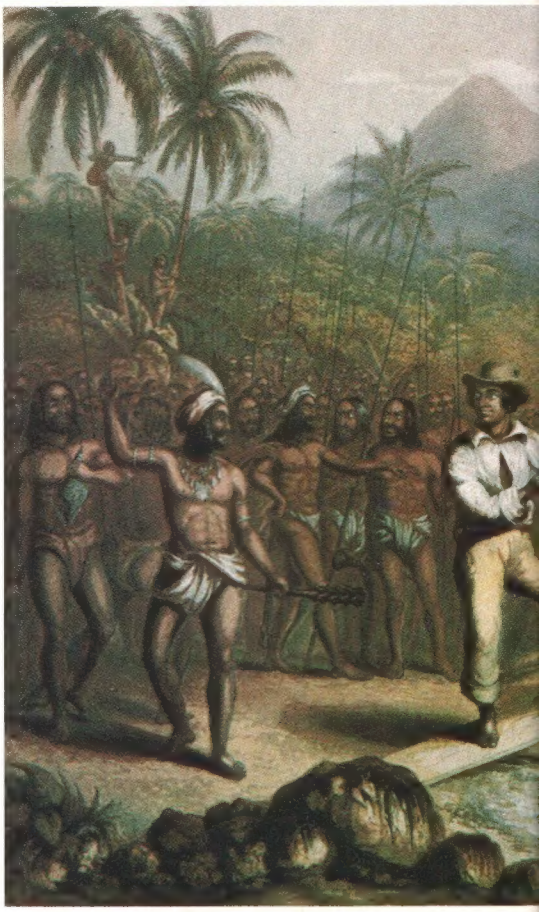
The remarkable career of John Williams ended abruptly on November 20, 1839, in the South Pacific. The natives of Eromanga celebrated his arrival on their Melanesian island with a cannibal feast, serving him as the main course. It was a suitable end for a missionary who had always courted adventure and danger.

Early in 1814 he was just young Williams the blacksmith, shoeing horses in the City of London. But then, one memorable winter night at Moorfields Congregational church, he was "aroused," relates his biographer, "from spiritual slumber." He became a hot gospeller and took up Sunday-school teaching. But that proved a tame challenge for a man who was "ready to die for the Lord Jesus." More to his liking was the audacious ambition of missionaries "to fill the whole earth with the glory of the Lord," and by 1817 he was off to the South Seas for the London Missionary Society.

From mission headquarters on Ra'iatea in the Tahiti islands, John Williams boldly set out to convert the South Pacific. By 1834 he had travelled 100,000 miles in Polynesia and visited every island of importance within 2,000 miles of Tahiti, leaving native teachers on many of them. He had suffered six shipwrecks and numerous narrow escapes from death by stabbing or shooting. Nothing daunted, he still dreamed of going on to Melanesia, the western islands of the South Pacific whose inhabitants were notorious for their savagery.

John Williams, being a practical man, was well suited to a pioneering missionary's work. His skill with a saw was often useful in cutting up idols. His direct approach enabled him to take pleasure in outward and visible signs of success. Once, for example, he triumphantly dangled abandoned idols from the yard-arms as he sailed home to Ra'iatea. There the trophies were displayed in the chapel, and a victory hymn was sung: "Faaoto'tu," or "Blow ye the trumpet, blow."

The inward and spiritual reality was less triumphant: the Christianity of many converts was little more than a superstitious dread of the strange new God Jehovah whose servants brought axes, mirrors and scissors. Such marvels of Western technology often impressed the natives more than the "power of the Gospel" so confidently adduced by Williams. Mercifully the complexity of his task escaped him, but on the morning of his martyrdom, as the enormous size of Melanesia dawned on him, he did at last express doubts about the ability of one man to convert whole archipelagos.



In this painting, John Williams, pioneer missionar

Before Williams had a chance to bring the Christia

of the South Pacific, is shown facing his greatest and final challenge: savage islanders of Eromanga.

message to bear on the natives of Eromanga, they clubbed and speared him to death, then ate him.

shoulder – or French Papists surely would – the more positive and expensive task of civilizing the Africans. This required the provision of the economic means – i.e. legitimate commerce – for an alternative Western way of life for Africans.

The immediate threat of withdrawal passed, but the need for government help did not. Indeed, it grew more insistent. The missionaries made their own attempts, it is true, to bring Western civilization to Africa. By the 1880s Dr. Robert Laws of the Church of Scotland, with the help of wealthy industrialists in Glasgow, had put Buxton's civilizing programme into practice at Livingstonia in Nyasaland. But its implementation on any significant scale was far beyond the unaided resources of the missionary societies, skilled as they were in the art of raising funds and overcoming crises.

Moreover, the missionaries were forced to realize that they alone could not protect their converts or their investments from the rival patriotic-religious attempts of other European powers or from undesirable commercial elements. Nor did they have sufficient prestige to win over African rulers.

So the missionaries went cap in hand to the government. To maintain their shaky ascendancy over their African clergy and lay religious workers in Sierra Leone, for example, they used all their influence to ensure the continuation of an official British presence in the form of the naval squadron that patrolled the coast. During the African Scramble crisis of the late 1880s, when the European powers disputed who was to have what part of Africa, Evangelical groups claimed that more than £200,000 had been spent in Nyasaland alone to "create a Christian nation" and pointed out that it would be a disgraceful waste to abandon this socio-economic investment. The argument, successful in helping convince Whitehall to take over sections of East and Central Africa, was also used later to justify annexation of part of New Guinea.

As allies and even front-men of Empire, the missionaries enjoyed considerable success in Africa before the arrival of full colonialism. In South Africa, for example, where missionaries had been active since the beginning of the 19th Century, the LMS won a notable victory over that buccaneering capitalist, Cecil Rhodes. He planned to replace the British

protectorate in Bechuanaland (where LMS people had held sway) with administration by his own South Africa Company. But the Superintendent of the LMS missions in Cape Colony, John Mackenzie, took energetic and successful counter-measures, culminating in the reception of Khama, the Christian Chief of the Ngwato, by Lord Salisbury and Queen Victoria. Rhodes was stung to fury. "It is humiliating," he wrote, "to be utterly beaten by these niggers. They think more of one native, at home, than the whole of South Africa." Rhodes's revenge took the form of financing a henchman's campaign which defeated Sir Herbert Spicer, Treasurer of the LMS, in his bid to retain his seat in Commons at the next general election.

It was during this period of Empire in Africa that missionaries proved their nuisance value. They were not content merely to pull strings in Whitehall. After a naval bombardment razed Old Calabar, the missionaries made rebuilding conditional upon the Chief's full acceptance of missionary civilization. Delighted with their success in this instance, the missionaries then began to look with favour upon armed expeditions into the interior. By the 1890s these forays had become almost continuous, and with the aid of Maxim guns and repeating rifles the hinterlands were opened to missionary – and imperial – activity.

The missionaries then took another step, arrogating to themselves even greater power: in 1891 a CMS-sponsored organization raised £16,000 to help finance a private "police force" stationed in Uganda. The British East African Company itself only contributed another £15,000, so it is clear that the missionaries felt it very important to secure the continued support of armed men against the double menace of Muslim propaganda and French Catholic missionaries.

The availability of troops, though in very limited numbers, was a temptation to missionaries who for a long time had had to make diplomatic concessions to Satan, acquiescing through weakness in un-Christian practices. They were soon tempted to go too far. Relying on the presence of colonial troops near by, Herbert Tugwell, the fiery CMS Bishop of Equatorial West Africa who was already waging a fierce war against the liquor interests, led a missionary commando force into northern Nigeria where he was ignominiously halted at Kano by a native army. Frederick Lugard, British Administrator of Northern Nigeria, felt obliged to send a face-saving detachment of his newly formed and already over-extended West African Frontier Force to rescue the Bishop.

From that moment on, missionary activity was severely restricted in the Muslim strongholds of Egypt, the Sudan and the northern territories of West Africa. In non-Muslim areas, too, missionaries were now carefully watched by administrators who, like the traders, often saw them as troublesome fanatics. Full colonialism had come to the side of the missionaries, but it proved a dangerous and often untrustworthy ally.

After the power of the missionaries was curtailed, Lugard was free to install his system of indirect rule through puppet chiefs and emirs, supported or prodded by troops under the command of travelling commissioners. But because of their local knowledge and linguistic ability, missionaries still had to be used as consultants or interpreters.

They were now extremely uncomfortable politically. Compared with their pioneering days, they were bound hand and foot by the colonial regime they themselves had asked to shore up their enterprise. A new period of uneasy co-existence began. Many officials openly preferred Islam to Christianity because there was no nonsense about democracy nor any attempt to produce bumptious "savvy boys," their contemptuous phrase for mission-educated African intellectuals. Officials conceded that there had to be some kind of Western schooling, if only to provide the necessary quota of clerks for commerce and the lower ranks of the civil service, so missionaries were allowed to continue to run the schools. According to this reasoning, missionaries, once the pioneers, should now act as the drudges of Empire.

There was another change in missionary life as well: no longer were living conditions primitive. In the increasingly congenial mission stations the missionaries began to copy the living standards and segregationist ideology of colonial government – "equality in things spiritual, agreed divergence in things physical and material," as Lugard phrased it. Officials and businessmen were willing to put in an appearance at church for example's sake, but only if they did not have to worship with the natives. The separate churches which resulted were a symbol of racial apartness.

Another sign of racial apartness was the Crowther affair. Back in the 1850s, Henry Venn, Secretary of the CMS, had foreseen that the foreign missionaries would, in the not-too-distant future, become unwelcome. So he strongly urged that Africans be trained to evangelize their fellow Africans. In 1864, with much solemnity and publicity, Samuel Adjai Crowther, a liberated slave and a member of the Yoruba tribe, had been consecrated bishop in Canterbury Cathedral. For nearly 30 years thereafter, he directed the all-African Niger Mission, going deep inland where (largely because of the terrible climate) white missionaries never ventured. Crowther was virtually a roving British Consul, and the War Office discussed using his team as Intelligence agents to provide information about French designs on the region. Crowther and his fellow black bishop, James Johnson, were for long the pride of the CMS as well as of African nationalists.

But when a new wave of missionaries arrived in Nigeria in the 1880s, Crowther and his work came under heavy fire. The new men were products of the Student Volunteer Movement, which had swept the universities in the 1860s and had made a missionary career both respectable and glamorous for graduates of Cambridge and Oxford. The new brooms were looking for something to sweep, and they found it in Crowther's mission. It was, they alleged, corrupt and far too lenient with polygamy, ritual murder and other forms of tribal barbarity. So saying, they took over control of the mission and treated the aged Crowther with scarcely veiled contempt.

In London, reflecting the new attitudes, the official CMS history was rewritten to explain away the Niger Mission as an "error" on the part of Henry Venn. Crowther's old friend Bishop Johnson turned on the CMS and gave the lead to a chorus of African nationalist criticism. The incident hastened the birth of breakaway African Churches where polygamy – a symbol, Africans maintained, of social responsibility rather than of irresponsible lust – was accepted and African clergy were no longer kept down by a London-ordained ceiling on promotion ❧

"From Greenland's Icy Mountains..."

British missionary endeavour reached its peak in the 19th Century. Men and women of God, sent out by the missionary societies, bravely defied extremes of climate, fearful diseases, and the hostility of native tribes, but they were never entirely able to master opposition from their own countrymen.

Wary administrators at home were unwilling to take on new imperial responsibilities to protect fearless preachers, and local interests feared that disruptive missionary influence might turn passive natives into trouble-makers.

Missionaries countered by appealing to the pious self-righteousness of the Victorians. They sang robustly of the call "From Greenland's icy mountains/From India's coral strand. . . ." At meetings, in books and through pictures – like these issued by the London Missionary Society showing its work in parts of India, Africa and North America – the societies assessed the task of the missionaries in the over-simplified terms of practical Christianity.

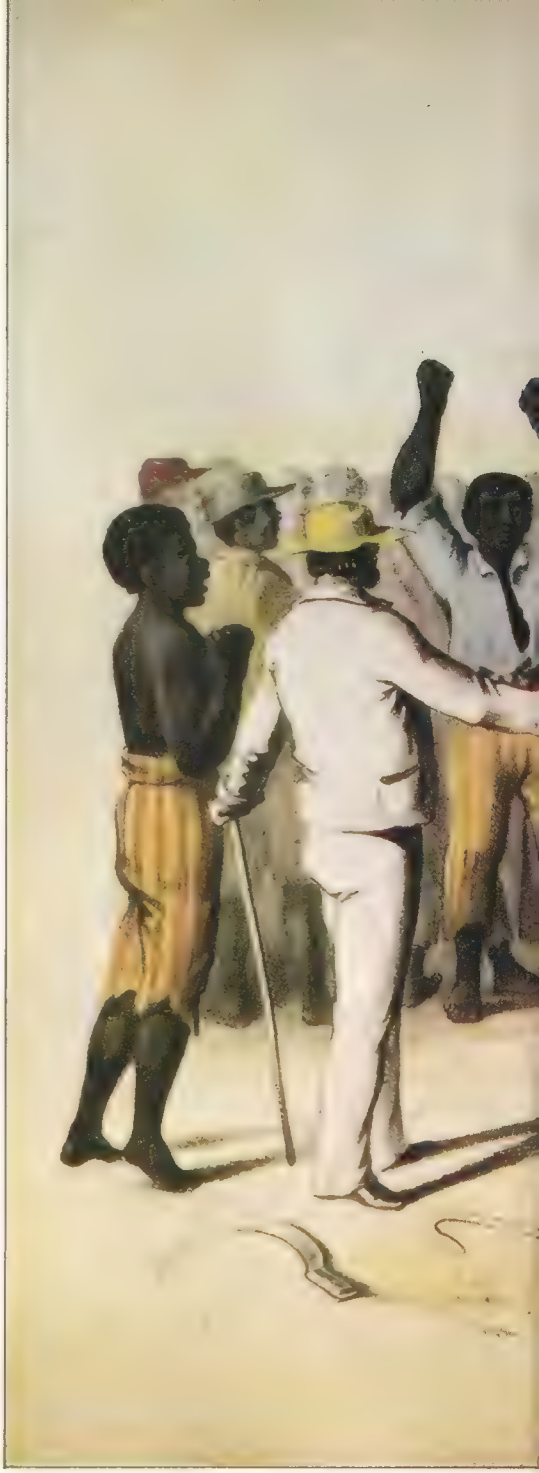
An itinerant preacher, travelling through India, exhorts a group of villagers. His Indian assistant, on his left, translates his words and distributes tracts.

New Rituals for Old

Until late in the 19th Century most of West Africa was a closed book to missionaries. Missions, along with scattered trading settlements, clung to the charted and familiar coastlands of West Africa and only in Sierra Leone had the missionaries penetrated very far inland.

Sierra Leone had in 1787 been selected by Britain as the home of liberated slaves, regardless of where they had originally lived, and this artificial society, with no strong tribal units or ancient traditions, provided fertile soil for the missionaries. Both on the coast and inland, they had in effect a population ripe for conversion and for the training of native clergy. For once administrators and missionaries could work together, in the words of one governor "to convert that highway of slave-dealers and haunt of cruel superstition into a land of peaceful liberty and enlightened morality."

Where religion came, education followed. Schools and colleges were established, notably the Fourah Bay College, founded in Sierra Leone in 1827 for the higher education of West Africans. It was the sort of impact missionaries dreamed of making all over the dark continent, a dream that only began to be realized towards the turn of the century as a succession of courageous explorers and travellers opened up the vast, trackless expanse of the tropical African heartland.



African converts, their feet fastened through holes in a wall on the orders of the local witch-doctor, suffer for their new-found faith.

At a girls' school in Sierra Leone, a European teacher inspects her pupil's exercise-books. In the background, a native assistant highlights a lesson in geography by pointing out Britain on the world map.

A missionary supervises the destruction of a fetish tree which, as an object of worship, has been ornamented with rags, sheep skulls and bits of old iron. The owner (left) stands by in amazement, perhaps at last convinced that his gods have been proved powerless.

Natives from various tribes kneel to receive Communion from a native clergyman in Sierra Leone. The well-endowed church offers additional testimony to the success of missionary activity in this colony.

Spreading Word of the "Great Spirit"

From the earliest days of exploration, the British looked on the Indians of Canada as a fertile field for missionary activity. The charter granted to Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1583 for his expedition to America stated that "God hath reserved these Gentiles to be introduced into Christian civility by the English nation."

But the task of preaching the word to remote, nomadic and often hostile tribes who spoke unknown languages was formidable. Even when the missionaries were successful, strong measures had to be taken to prevent backsliding: in the 17th Century "Praying Towns" were set up to separate some 4,000 converts from the pagan influence of their own tribes.

Once converted, Indians generally became extraordinarily staunch Christians, enduring days of freezing travel "for the express purpose of being instructed in the Great White Spirit's Book," as they called the Bible. "When it is remembered that native Indians are a most indolent and apathetic race," wrote a missionary, "such a change is truly wonderful."

Even more dramatic was the success of missionaries among the Canadian Eskimoes about 1900. The readiness of the region's first Bishop – Archibald Lang Fleming, "Archibald the Arctic" – to share the hardships of Eskimo life helped turn 80 per cent of all Canadian Eskimoes into faithful Anglicans.

Indians stepping gingerly on slippery, tilting ice-floes, cross a river to attend a service.

Converts huddle in blankets as they listen to a sermon in a freezing wooden church.

Friendly tribesmen whisk an apprehensive young

missionary upriver by canoe, sometimes the only way to cover the hundreds of miles that separated the scattered Indian settlements.

II. In Need of Protection

To their reports (right) of how "God was working his purpose out," missionary editors added tales of adventure in order to capitalize on the popular interest in primitive and far-away places.

In the Pacific and the Far East, the missionaries needed government help and protection, as they did in Africa. But here also their relations with government were uneasy. One minute the missionaries were pushing, the next they were pulling; one minute they were urging government intervention, the next they were demanding freedom from government interference.

In the South Sea islands, the combination of dedicated missionary activity and heavy government protection produced astonishingly rapid results. In a short time, the first Evangelical arrivals succeeded in demolishing age-old traditions. In their place, several generations of missionaries grimly substituted a semblance of Puritan life. But once this was achieved, thoughtful missionaries began to have serious second thoughts about the value of Crown control.

The presence of government forces had indeed for 50 years made the islands a missionary preserve. In truth, the forces were still necessary to protect the islands against the threat of intrusion by French Catholic priests and by assorted white riff-raff – the traders who sold guns and liquor, the "blackbirders" who kidnapped islanders to work as near-slaves for the plantations of Queensland and in the profitable pearl-diving ventures. The islanders often murdered innocent missionaries in reprisal for these blackbirding raids, since they were the only scapegoats to hand. In all, 30 missionaries, white and indigenous, were killed. To combat these dangers, the government was pestered into passing the Pacific Islands Protection Act in 1872. It then had to be cajoled into implementing it and shown how to administer it.

Talented spokesmen, including the Rev. Lorimer Fison in Fiji and the Revs. James Chalmers and W. G. Lawes in New Guinea, set about the work of convincing the authorities that the missionary movement had all the answers. They explained the intricacies of native land tenure (which bore no resemblance to British property law) and dazed the officials with barrages of linguistic, anthropological and geographical knowledge.

Chalmers was the only missionary to win the approval of Robert Louis Stevenson, the Bohemian author who had moved permanently to the South Seas, and had come to admire the islanders. Among missionaries, Chalmers was noted for his refusal to wear the top hat and funereal garments which made so many of his colleagues look like undertakers. He had also taken a realistic attitude towards the different quality of life in the island. So he refused to condemn work on the Sabbath and he refused to Anglicize the New Guineans. "Christ," he said, "will receive them without adopting English customs."

Chalmers had an ambivalent attitude towards government. He was quite prepared to call for government protection when he thought it necessary. For example, he summoned a British man-of-war to Port Moresby during the gold rush of 1878 to prevent Australian prospectors from ruthlessly pushing tribesmen off their land. When he thought government help was not necessary, he resolutely refused it. With legendary bravery he went unarmed among head-hunting tribes whose savagery had frightened off a proposed New Guinea Company. His success as a peacemaker was such that the administrators of British New Guinea, annexed in 1884, did not need a single soldier to assist them. Thus he confounded the prediction, made by a Governor in Australia to the Colonial Office, which pointed out that "since the Maori War cost £12 million, the acquisition of New Guinea might cost as much."

But Chalmers was not committed to annexation as the universal solution for the protection of the islanders. Facing the members of the profoundly imperialist Royal Colonial Institute at a London meeting in 1887, he stated boldly that annexation too often resulted in a field-day for "the young, daring, pushing Anglo-Saxon who sees in every native an impediment to progress."

In China, as in Africa and the Pacific, the missionaries found that they needed official aid to continue their work. China was not a colony, nor even within the sphere of influence of one European power. The missionaries' task was therefore a delicate one, beset with political complications, and they were soon incurring the wrath of official circles.

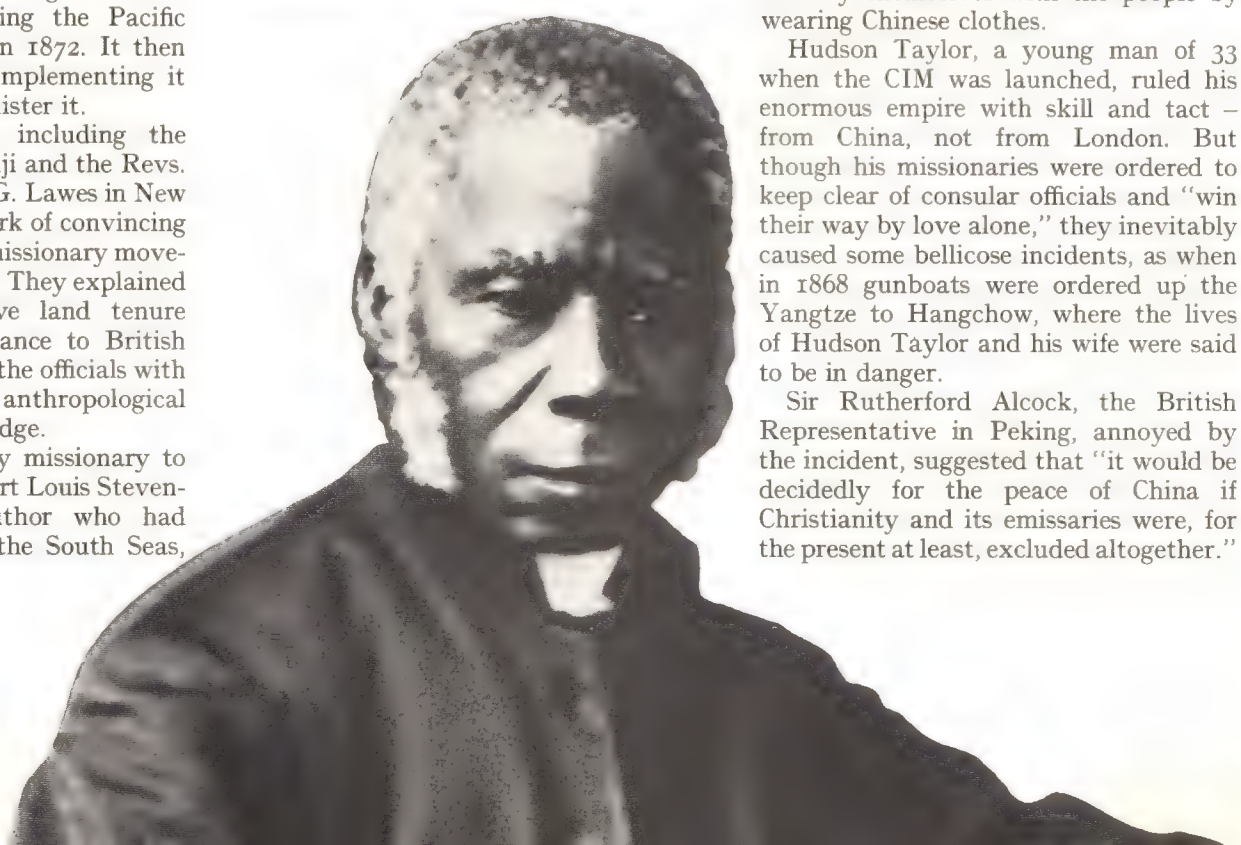
The Celestial Empire had become an important target for the missionaries in the mid-19th Century and several of the evangelical organizations sent pioneer groups to sell Christianity to this vast market of souls.

The most picturesque and daring organization was the China Inland Mission (CIM), founded in 1865 by the Baptist James Hudson Taylor. The CIM re-stressed the priority of "pure" (preaching) as opposed to "welfare" (classroom and hospital ward) evangelism. An international and interdenominational undertaking, it carried on with sensational success "in faith" (no direct appeals for money) and required its members to identify themselves with the people by wearing Chinese clothes.

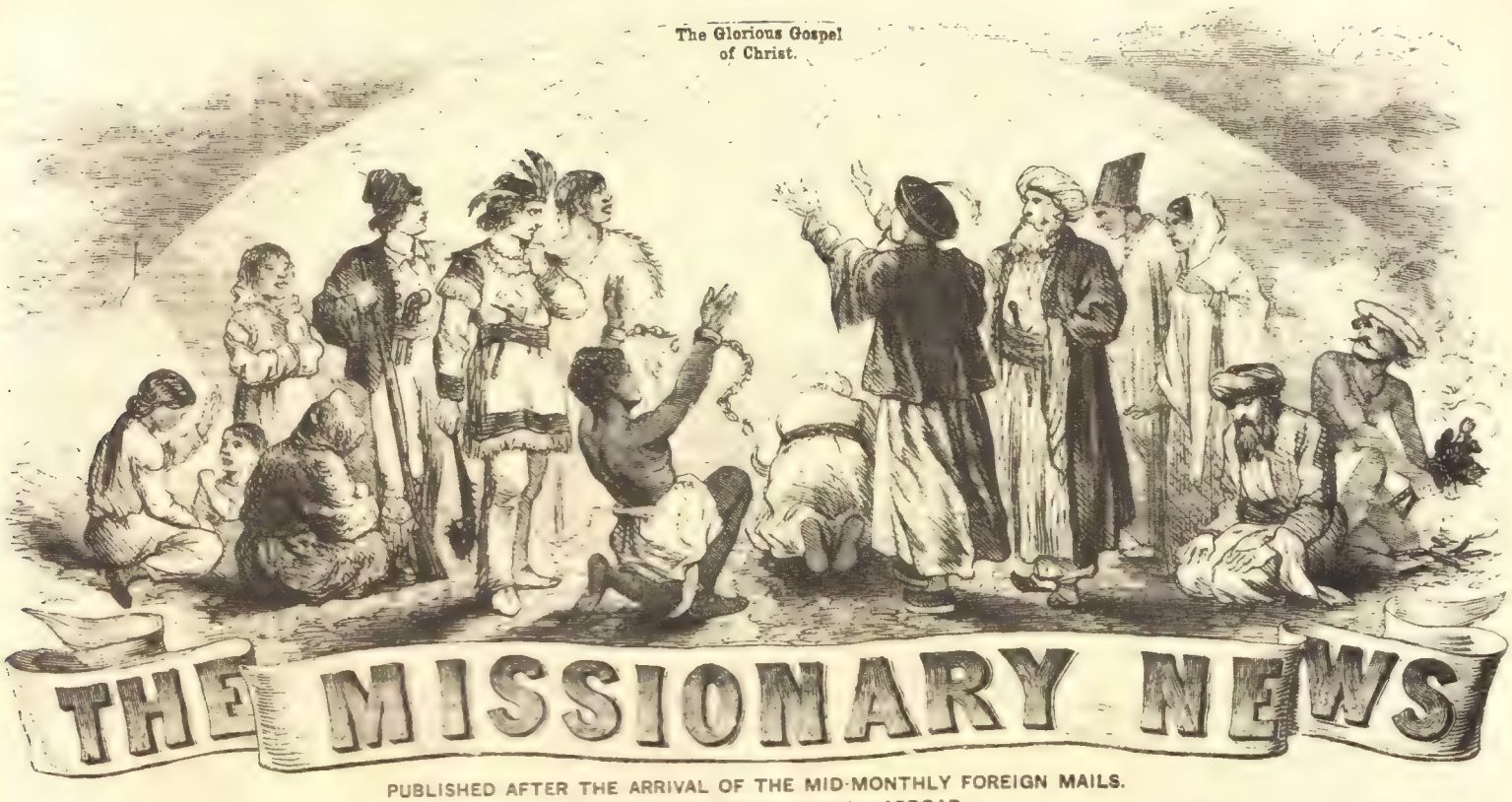
Hudson Taylor, a young man of 33 when the CIM was launched, ruled his enormous empire with skill and tact – from China, not from London. But though his missionaries were ordered to keep clear of consular officials and "win their way by love alone," they inevitably caused some bellicose incidents, as when in 1868 gunboats were ordered up the Yangtze to Hangchow, where the lives of Hudson Taylor and his wife were said to be in danger.

Sir Rutherford Alcock, the British Representative in Peking, annoyed by the incident, suggested that "it would be decidedly for the peace of China if Christianity and its emissaries were, for the present at least, excluded altogether."

In 1864 Samuel Crowther, once a slave, became the first black Anglican Bishop and led a new mission into east Nigeria. He claimed to be a "black Englishman" and could cite an honorary degree at Oxford.



The Glorious Gospel
of Christ.



THE MISSIONARY NEWS

PUBLISHED AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF THE MID-MONTHLY FOREIGN MAILS.
REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.

No. 4.] THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1866. [PRICE THREE HALFPENCE.
By Post Two Shillings & Sixpence per annum.

AN AFRICAN TOWN ON THE CONGO RIVER.

His despatches, and the angry demand of one Chinese Minister – "take away your opium and your missionaries" – drove the Foreign Secretary to complain in the House of Lords that "we are always on the brink of war, not on account of the violation of any British rights or of any injury to commerce, but on account of good but imprudent men."

But in China as elsewhere missionaries were found indispensable as interpreters, in the widest sense, and political consultants. Even the Boxer Rising of 1900, during which more than 100 Protestant missionaries were killed, did not deter any of the societies. But it was followed by an international punitive expedition, made up of British, German, French, Russian and Japanese troops, which caused more than usually sharp criticism of the arrogant European ambassadors of the Prince of Peace.

Many critics have attacked the missionaries for their involvement with imperialism. They accuse the missionaries of being the forerunners of imperial expansion and, on occasion, its instigators, meddling in politics when they should have been concerned solely with religion. To what extent was this indictment justified?

It is true that missionaries often asked the government to intervene in native affairs. They summoned gunboats, they called in colonial troops, they demanded annexation. On the face of it, they behaved just like imperialists. Not only did they behave that way, they also tended to think like imperialists, for they were affected by the imperialist ethic which swept European society in the latter part of the 19th Century. Soon the missionary lobby in Britain openly admitted that the missions were implicated in the activities of commercial and political interests.

Eventually, it was hard to decide whether the missionaries were influencing the imperialists, or the imperialists influencing the missionaries. Joseph Chamberlain's aggressive speeches, Rudyard Kipling's exultant imperialist mystique which borrowed missionary ideals and arguments, seemed to more excitable evangelists to contain the heart of the matter. It was exhilarating to feel part of a grand imperial mission; gratifying to be lauded as the fearless exponents of all that was healthiest and most virile in the national character; and a relief to find some common ground with the colonial authorities (in Nigeria, Sir Harry Johnston noticed with pleasure in a report he made that missionaries were "showing plenty of British bunting").

Since the missionaries were men of their own time, their heads were turned by the arrogance of the era. They felt they were bringing to the non-white, non-Christian world the unquestionably superior civilization of their own society and, like imperialists imposing upon natives the manifold advantages of colonial rule, they forced down their throats the manifold advantages of Western thinking. For the *Pax Britannica* had bred in many missionaries a heavily paternalist tone towards their "children."

All this was true, but it was not the whole truth. Only a hopelessly oversimplified hindsight can classify all missionaries as agents or cat's-paws of imperialism. History is more complex than that. As in any human group, there were men for and men against: missionaries who opposed Empire as well as missionaries who welcomed it. For example, C.C. Newton, a Baptist missionary in Nigeria, welcomed the Ijebu punitive expedition of 1892. "Thousands of slaves," he wrote, "will rejoice to see the Union Jack waving above their masters' heads. . . . A sword of steel often goes before a sword of the spirit." To Newton it seemed absurd to pretend that the white-officered African soldiers of the Queen were not performing a work of righteousness and social justice. Freeing slaves, he felt, was a humanitarian act made possible only by British intervention with armed force.

On the other hand, there were missionaries who supported opposite viewpoints with equal trenchancy. One of the earliest superintendents of the LMS missions in Cape Colony, John Philip, openly expressed his conviction that, given equal opportunities, the African would disprove the theory of innate European superiority. Influenced by his pressure, in 1828 the Cape government had awarded "all free persons of colour" the same civil and legal rights as white settlers. This action, together with the enforced emancipation of slaves, was one of the causes of the Great Trek that marked the first effort of the Boers to get away from British rule.

Through all their vicissitudes British missionaries did retain a certain independence and continued to expose and attack the sins of their fellow civilizers. Wherever missionaries were the first, or the

The China Inland Mission publicized its successes through its own magazine, started in 1875, and today still published as *East Asia Millions*.

first to stay, on the scene, as in New Zealand in the 1840s, they held off colonial rule as long as they could. Edward Gibbon Wakefield claimed to have met a Maori who asked him what the "godmen" meant by saying that all white men not missionaries were devils.

When they became increasingly subjected to the colonial system, the missionaries still often asserted their right to oppose the government – or at least to circumvent the decisions of administrators – whenever they felt that they were in the right and the government in the wrong. In the light of the opposition they encountered, it is surprising how often they got their way.

But then, so many of them were not the sort to be content with less. They were individualists, sometimes to the point of eccentricity. C. T. Studd, for example, had a "cricket-pitch church," 22 yards long and wide, built in the Congo jungle, and in his sixties, suffering from chronic asthma, imagined that St. Paul was urging him to "go in for a slog! Your eye's in and their bowling is getting weak. Take the long handle! Bravo!" Francis McDougall, the first Bishop of Borneo, fought off pirates with a double-barrelled rifle; Bishop MacKenzie engaged in gunfights with Arab slave-raiders along the Zambezi. Men of this stamp were not likely to be awed by official disapproval of their methods. In fact, they frequently defied authority.

Walter Miller, who kept up a kind of one-man patrol of the Muslim north of Nigeria, managed to get two particularly sadistic emirs removed. Mary Slessor, as a Vice-Consul and Justice of the Peace, sometimes whacked obstructive chiefs with her umbrella but she refused to be bound by the letter of the law and force social change by the book. "After all," she remarked, "we are foreigners and they own their country, so I always try to make the law fit in while we adjust things between us." Bishop Alfred Tucker, who served in Uganda from 1893 to 1911, never ceased to advocate a native Church in which national and foreigner should serve on equal terms – contrary to official policy. Indeed, by many of their actions the missionaries can reasonably claim to have been the conscience of the British Empire, not unthinking agents ❧

Living Close to God

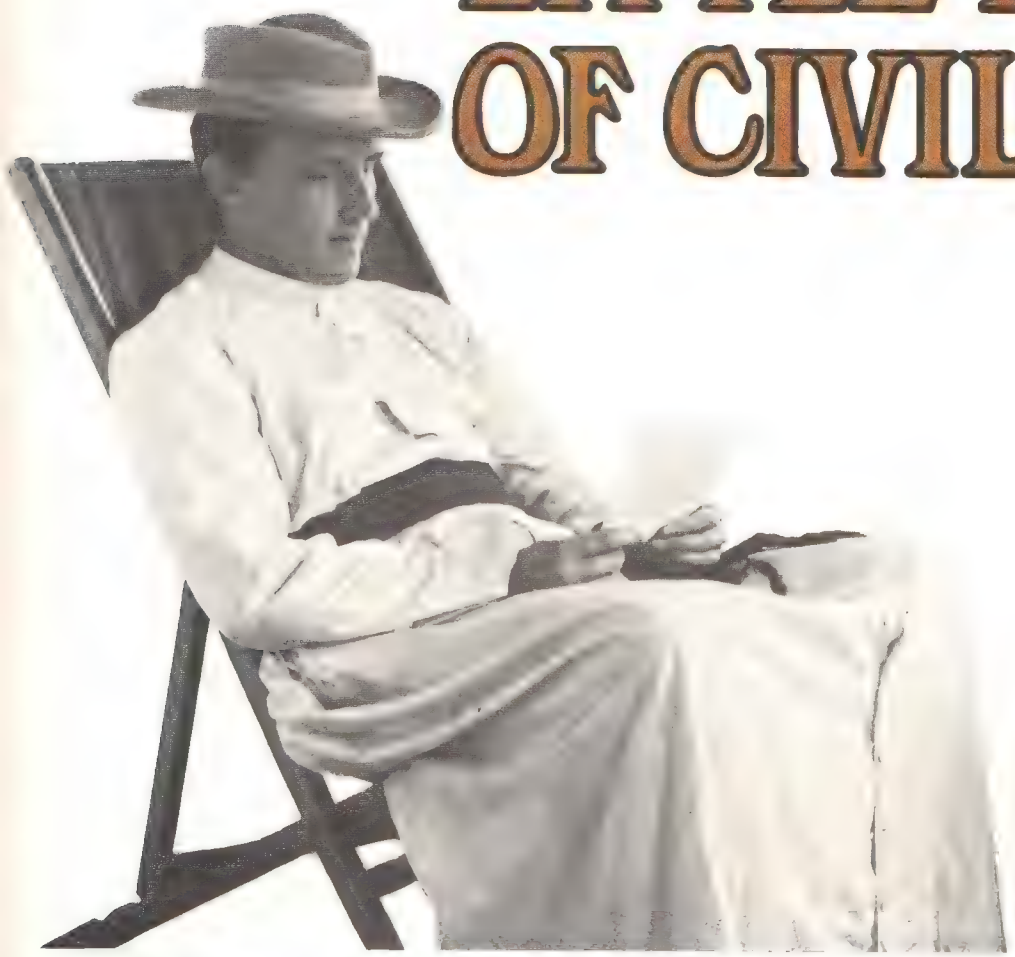
"Our calling in Christ Jesus," wrote Mrs. Jennie Taylor in 1899, after years as her husband's active partner, "is to live supernatural lives." James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, did just that. He drove his weak, unhealthy body all over the world, jolting it across China in unsprung carts, wearing it out in night-long vigils of gnawing worry.

He ran the mission for nearly 40 years from 1865 without an assured income. He made no appeals for money, only for prayer "on behalf of 150 millions of Chinese." Hudson Taylor had an extraordinarily dramatic message. Of these millions, 12 million a year – 1 million a month – were dying without the saving grace of the one true God. Men of goodwill, impressed by his efforts to save these "precious souls," gave liberally. The CIM grew dramatically.

Hudson Taylor could never have achieved all this without faith of childlike innocence and intensity. His secret was a deep personal knowledge of God. Invariably, in the quiet time an hour before dawn, he awoke and read his Bible by the light of a candle. On the principle "Ask and it shall be given you," he prayed for everything, even breakfast. A fellow traveller in China once heard him singing "We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food." Since supplies had run out, he asked what food Taylor meant. "It cannot be far away," was the reply. "Our Father knows we are hungry and will send our breakfast soon." Just ahead, they met a man selling rice. To colleagues, such a man seemed a miracle. As indeed he was.

The Hudson Taylors' clothes identified them with the Chinese among whom they worked.

LITTLE POCKETS OF CIVILIZATION



A resting missionary brings to tropical Africa the atmosphere of an English vicarage garden.

The missionaries sailed from Southampton with the Gospel message, but when they arrived among the palm fronds, they brought other tidings as well. They taught the natives to read, for literacy was the key to the Bible. Then they imparted the skills, theories and values of Europe. Soon the mission stations became little pockets of Western civilization, dotted through "the heart of savagedom" (a missionary catchphrase).

These enclaves were dynamite placed under tribal societies. They broke down local customs, particularly those, like nudity and polygamy, which outraged them. In many places they published the first newspapers. Through print, pulpit and school-desk, the missionaries generated contempt for all aspects of the traditional societies that they confronted. In short, they were the spearheads of the modern world.

An earnest missionary teaching the Gospel story in a north Indian village uses a narrative painting to supplement his rudimentary Hindi.

In the heat of an African afternoon, a husband and wife team impart the certainties of Victorian Britain to a new generation of schoolboys in tropical cassocks.

The Powers of Healing

Conditions of life for the missionary were deadly. "Mosquitoes were swarming around us, seemingly delighted with fresh British blood," recalled one missionary, a girl in her early twenties, when she arrived in East Africa in 1885. Tortured by biting ants, unable to quench her burning thirst except with thick, muddy water strained through a cloth, she travelled into the steaming jungle on foot, often wading through deep water in the swamps. Malaria and dysentery struck suddenly, carrying off foreigner and natives alike.

In such conditions, the missionaries had to become doctors as well as schoolmasters, builders, farmers, printers, translators. At first their dispensaries were little more than first-aid posts, and surgery meant amputation. Later, selfless men and women turned the crude huts into great hospitals and set up homes for lepers and tubercular patients.

When the labour of caring for the needy could be shared with professional doctors and nurses, more missionaries were at last able to concentrate on preaching. A measure of their success is the number of Christians in present-day Africa: an estimated 42 million to 60 million people. And in the fields of missionary activity outside Africa, Christianity can count millions of adherents.

An East African poses with his family in 1885 after being ordained a deacon. In missionary parlance, this new churchman had joined the "native agency."

In a tumble-down dispensary in Africa, missionaries of the 1890s bring new hope to their patients with microscopes and an awe-inspiring array of medicine bottles.

The table in the dispensary on Likoma Island in Lake Nyasa stands in tins of disinfectant to ward off climbing insects.

III. A Tea-Drinking Existence

One consular official complained bitterly, in a dispatch of 1911 to the Foreign Office, of his experience of "genteel" Protestant missionaries in India, Ceylon and West and East Africa. He was referring to the existence by that time of a domesticated, afternoon-tea-drinking existence at large mission stations, which was easy to make fun of. Laughing at the missionaries was almost an official pastime for in the British Empire there often lurked a strong anti-clericalism behind the Christian façade of government. If the missionaries found their alliance with imperialism irksome, colonial governors often felt the same way about their entanglement with the missionaries.

For instance, Sir Percy Girouard, Governor of Northern Nigeria, deplored "the half-civilized minions of the Christian mission," and advocated the complete withdrawal of missions from his area, claiming that "the best missionary for the present will be the high-minded, clean-living British Resident." The trouble with this theory was that very few British officials *were* clean-living.

Girouard's successor, Sir Hesketh Bell, sneered at the results of "Christian democracy" in Southern Nigeria. "We want," he said, "no transmogrification of the dignified and courteous Muslim into a trousered burlesque with a veneer of European civilization. We do not want to replace a patriarchal and venerable system of government by a discontented and irresponsible democracy of semi-educated politicians." These views were shared by Sir Arthur Hardinge, Consul in East Africa, who derided "the curious tendency of some missionaries to assume that any black scoundrel is Uncle Tom and every black girl a vestal virgin."

Even while the empire-builders were being positively vindictive about the missionaries, they were also using them to provide education and medical services on the cheap and to reconnoitre the virgin territories of the empire-to-be. Praise such as Sir Harry Johnston lavished on them in 1896 had a kind of obituary smugness: "They make all the experi-

In a tropical African mission station at the turn of the century, that venerable English institution, afternoon tea, is an indication that the missionaries have left their rough pioneering days behind them. Critics said that scenes like this proved that evangelicalism was dead.

ments and others reap the profit. On the results of their researches commerce is able to decide its timid steps and eventually we possess sufficient data to determine whether it is right and necessary for the Government to seal with its intervention the work which they began."

It was not only empire-builders who used the missionaries, but natives as well. Ambitious chiefs tried to use them to gain the education and prestige with which they hoped to strengthen their kingdoms. Indeed, by the end of the 19th Century many missionaries had begun to despair of the natives. Some of them, who had imagined creating instant Puritan communities peopled with grateful ex-heathen, were horrified by the persistent "immorality" of their converts. In their disillusionment some were inclined to agree with Sir Harry Johnston that "all the drunkards, liars, rogues and unclean livers" in West Africa were African Christians. Many accepted Johnston's conclusion that missionary work must be kept under firm white control if it was not to be sabotaged by African clergy whose "profane display of mouth religion is even more disgusting than their unbridled immorality." The myth of the noble savage, dear to the hearts of fund-raisers in Britain, crumbled under the assault of the voices of experience: "Let them spend a week in an African harem," grumbled Mary Slessor.

By the 1880s it seemed that the task of ennobling savages was likely to be a long drawn-out one.

This reassessment profoundly affected the missionary movement. An overwhelming sense of disillusionment at times descended to dampen their ardour. Weighed down by the sense of failure in their work and the persistence of official hostility, the missionaries lost their earlier colourful enthusiasm. Less and less were they to be found clothed in the "white shirt and native cloak of many colours" James Chalmers wore when leading a deputation of Raratongans. The time was past when Archibald Lang Fleming, the first Bishop of the Arctic region, spent a whole winter living in an igloo with two Eskimo families. He described his ordeal as "an affront to every civilized sense," but his patient endurance helped to bring about the conversion of the great majority of Canadian Eskimoes to Anglicanism. And it was no longer likely that Baptist missionaries would be inclined to follow the practice of predecessors in the Cameroons who allowed women to attend church naked.

For the missionaries were reverting to type, retiring to lick their wounds in the comparative security of their own way of life. They drifted increasingly apart from their native converts. Initial plans to preach the Gospel without attaching it to any form of Western organization soon broke down. Converts were imitative and needed firm shepherding. So denominational empires, faithful replicas of the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational or Presbyterian model, came into being. An example of this tendency is the story of an Indian clergyman who, on seeing St. Paul's Cathedral, inquired: "Is this a CMS church or an SPG church?"

As far as clothing habits were concerned, there was a logical rationale behind Christian "apartness." Converts expected Christians and Christian places of worship to look obviously different and so emphasize the break with the past. The covering of the body was a mark not just of modesty but of a willingness to make this break and to challenge tribal conservatism. European clothing was also calculated to raise the self-esteem of converts, who were nearly all from the

Congolese carvings of a missionary and a praying nun reflect Africans' awe in the face of the total missionary commitment to a strange new God. They also show how superb was native talent.

lower, despised levels of native tribal or caste society.

Yet, although there were good practical reasons for converts to make a break with native society, this apartness was a sign of narrower horizons and reduced objectives, plans and hopes that had failed and faded. The missionary compounds have been attacked as Christian ghettoes by various critics, and there is a certain truth in this. Asian and African Christians were often alienated from their own society; they found themselves in a hostile environment, taunted by their neighbours with being "collaborators." They relied on missionaries to defend them in an outcasts' retreat.

Missionary achievement was almost bound to fall short of the original aims of the movement, for those aims were too ambitious to take account of reality. Nevertheless, the missionary onslaught left a considerable mark on indigenous societies all over the world, considerable enough to generate a hot controversy about its good or bad effects.

There is no doubt that the missionaries caused great disruption of traditional systems: social disintegration that made "every man a chief," the breaking down of tribal, caste and kinship orders were part and parcel of their activity. One reason why colonial governments were keen to curtail the power of the missionaries was that they found that their activities created a kind of anarchy: the setting of slaves against their masters, of Christian children against their heathen parents, of "savvy boys" against the ignorant masses as well as their British mentors.

In retrospect it is easy to point out many instances in which missionaries compromised their principles. In New Zealand, contrary to orders, they traded axes and muskets in order to get food and to influence Maori chiefs in their favour. The result was a series of incredibly bloody and barbaric tribal wars as Maori tribes used European fire-power in an internecine campaign of mutual self-extermination. Unfortunately, compromise often proved essential to the missionaries for effectiveness and even for mere survival.

The missionaries have often been praised for the educational services they provided. But, although they achieved much, even here the results of their efforts were not all good. The missions never had enough funds to finance both primary and secondary education on a sufficient scale. The idea of government subsidization of schools was repugnant, for it would mean loss of control over educational policy. The missionaries therefore had to choose between supplying both primary and secondary education on an inadequate scale, or doing a good job on one of these levels. Since it was widely held that education should be geared to the needs of evangelization and godliness rather than to the demands and ambitions of the world, and since there was strong resistance to providing secondary schools as conveyor-belts for the supply of clerks to commerce and government service, the missionaries concentrated their limited resources on a programme of elementary schooling.

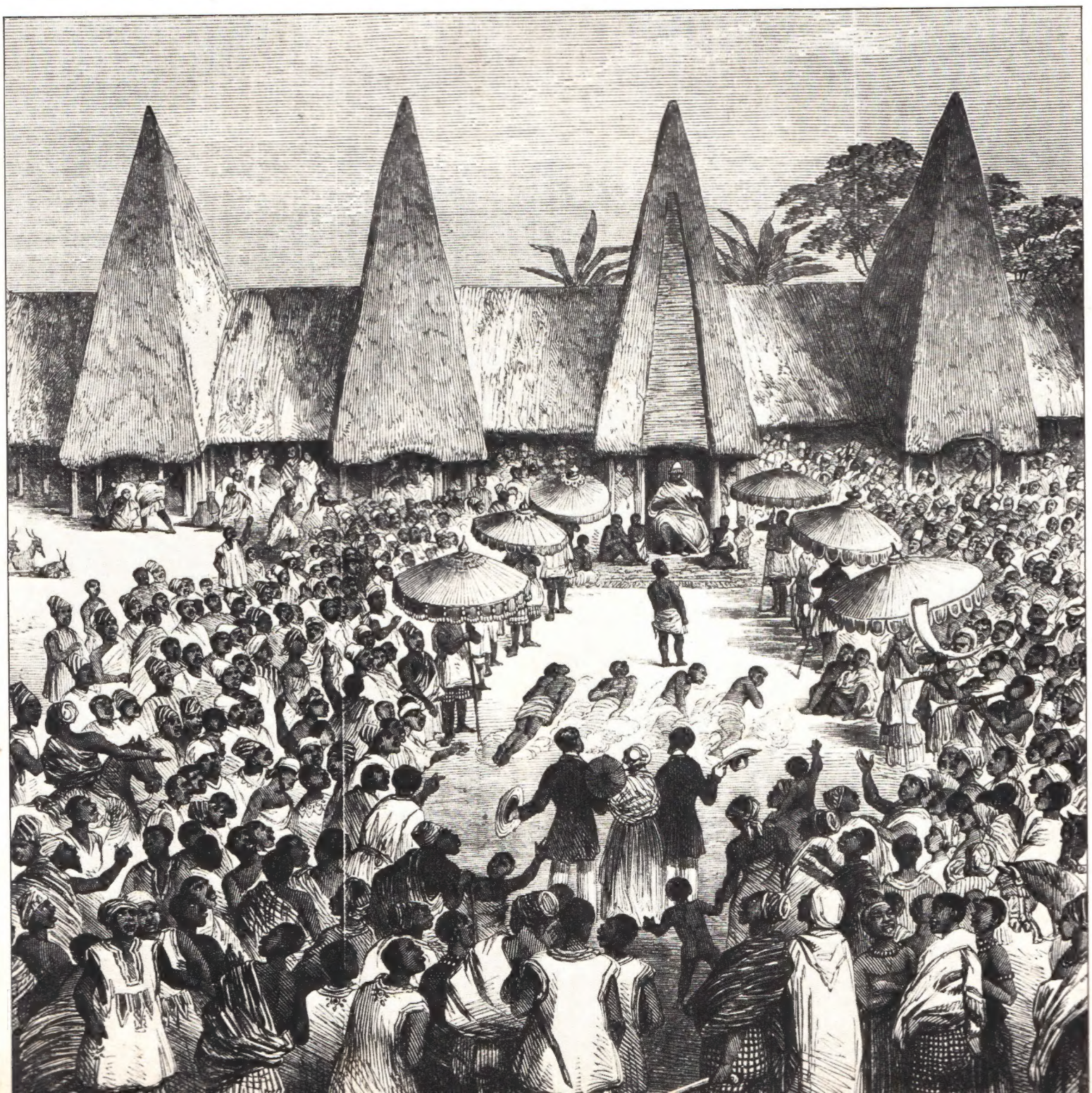
However, the Colonial Office was slow to make a start on filling the enormous gap in secondary and higher education. Stagnation resulted which caused much native resentment. The African middle class, which missionaries had hoped to create in their own image and saw as the

Hard-faced missionaries set out into the African bush. With wild beasts and savage tribes ahead, they had to be hard – and in the circumstances it is surprising that so many of them retained their humanity.

At his Court the King of Yoruba in Nigeria provides a lavish reception for three missionaries who arrived there in 1868.

catalyst of a transition to full Christianization, did not develop according to plan; eventually its members tended to look down upon the Church as a peasant institution offering badly paid careers. The more talented and energetic pupils went to Britain or America to acquire the skills with which to implement their professional or political ambitions. Naturally, only a few enjoyed the opportunity. The sad result is that today most African nations are ruled by tiny, often self-seeking élites which are divorced from the masses of the people.

A further destabilizing influence was the fact that the missionaries' job was only half done. In tropical Africa, where the missionary impact was greatest and full colonial rule often only spanned the lifetime of a single individual, radical destruction of the tribal structure was thwarted by lack of time. Through no fault of their own, the evangelists overseas did much to create a situation where old and new social forms existing side by side led to social tensions and conflict. However, the effects of missionary activity were not all bad. Historians now admit that missionaries preserved as well as destroyed; they defended, for instance, teaching in the local vernacular languages against the wishes of colonial governments in West Africa; they shielded the Aborigines of Australia; and they often created the very possibility of an indigenous cultural heritage. The American Negro writer, James Baldwin, reporting on a Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists held in Paris in 1956, told of his conversation with a delegate from Nigeria who, after delivering a lecture on the tonal structure of Yoruba poetry, confessed with sorrow that "the Yoruba language had only become a written language in the middle of the last century,



and this had been done by missionaries."

Literacy, which for some time meant reading the Bible and simple expository tracts, was one of the main missionary gifts to the African and Asian world. By the end of the 19th Century the complete Bible had been translated into more than 100 languages or dialects, the New Testament into 120, and some portions of the Bible into at least 300 more. This was almost entirely a Protestant, and pre-eminently a British, achievement.

In addition there were a number of indisputable humanitarian gains. The suppression of suttee and other manifestations of a decadent, oppressive Hinduism, the attacks on cannibalism, ritual murder and trial by poison, and the victorious anti-slavery campaign were forward steps which no one would wish to retrace. It also has to be recognized that the missionaries persistently and courageously worked to protect indigenous peoples against land-grabbing and labour exploitation. Their efforts formed the basis for the 20th Century concept of trusteeship adopted by the League of Nations.

Mission hospitals, treating patients of all creeds, made a profound impression on native populations by showing the impartial compassion as well as the efficiency of the White God's Magic. This was primarily the achievement of women. The female missionary, and in particular the unmarried female missionary, played a very great part in the history of the movement. By 1910 CMS women missionaries (including wives and widows) outnumbered men by 816 to 544. The same was true of other mission societies. The good work of these dedicated women was generally recognized by Africans. "I tell you true," said one African chief, "them women be best man for mission!"

Today missionary activity still goes on, but it is the palest shadow of what it once was. Now that the most dramatic period is long past and the interval of time allows a longer perspective, how does the history of the overseas missionary movement look to modern observers?

Always battling on two fronts against the "neo-pagan" materialism of their compatriots at home and in the field, as well as the unexpectedly deep capacity for survival of indigenous religions, the missionaries' first tremendous impetus was slowed by the very complexity and vastness of their self-appointed task. Only in special circumstances, notably in the Pacific islands, where for a while missionary theocracies imposed a Puritan way of life that was a total religious experience, did they manage to avoid the split between everyday life and religion which prevailed in most of the Western world from which they came.

Lacking the long experience, worldly wisdom, cohesion and ritualistic appeal of Catholicism, which in the second half of the 19th Century made a vigorous reappearance in the mission field, the British missionary movement nevertheless emerges as one of the most remarkable, adaptable and sustained outbursts of humanitarian zeal in modern history. Its influence on world history has been considerable. In particular, the doctrine that all men are spiritually equal gave a strong impetus to egalitarianism in many forms. As Governor Murray and Sydney Smith had long ago foreseen, this set off an anti-colonial chain reaction whose effects are still being felt.

By the 1920s the brash optimism of the early saints had been much modified and there was a tendency in some quarters to see in other higher religions spiritual merit and potential help in the broader struggle against secularism. But this was wisdom after the event. The 19th-Century missionaries were certain that they came to the non-Christian world as liberators. Such dynamic simplicity surely accounts for the lack of respect they showed towards long-established customs. As Archbishop William Temple, that very subtle Anglican, remarked at the World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem in 1928, "the only purely spiritual phenomena are good intentions, and we all know what portion of the universe is paved with them." The missionary movement could not have been, according to this definition, a purely spiritual enterprise.

At first the missionaries' brisk assault on indigenous society was seen as a moral and political imperative. Later it was challenged by anthropologists and cultural nationalists. Today there are probably many in the ex-colonial territories who feel that the building of a modern society might have been easier if the "civilizing mission" had been sustained longer and with more of the determination of the first pioneer missionaries.

Bishop Hine of Northern Rhodesia, in 1901 an elderly man, rests awhile from the arduous work by which he and many others had forged The Great Century of missionary endeavour.

Regency morning dress, 1828

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

EMPIRE OF TRADE AND CAPITAL